

COLONIAL NEWSLETTER

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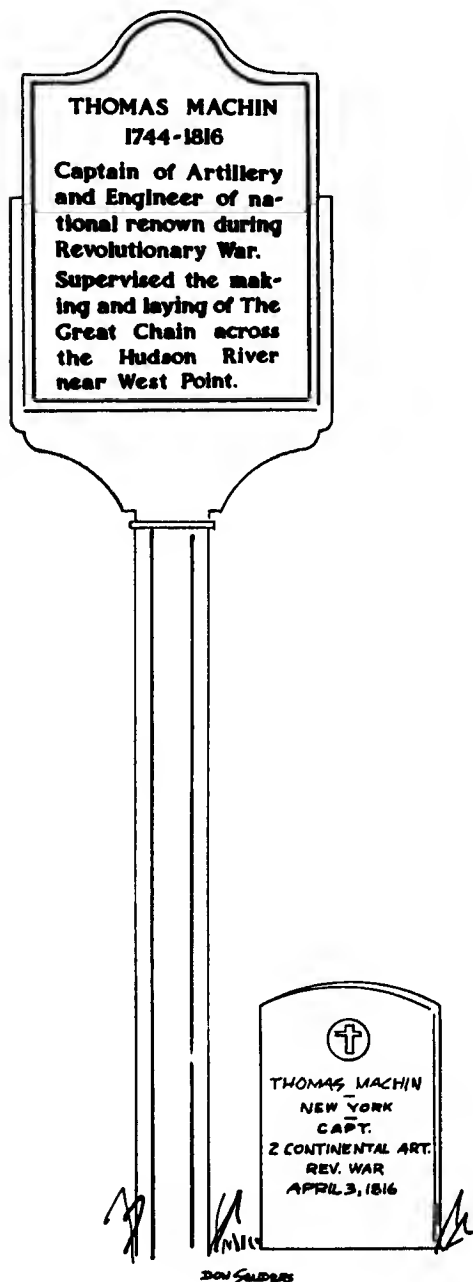
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THOMAS MACHIN -- PATRIOT

Most of us associated with "colonial" numismatics know Thomas Machin for the role he played in state coinage production after the close of the Revolutionary War. More important, however, was the role he played in the outcome of that war.

He was a British-born artilleryman, engineer, and surveyor who became convinced that the Colonists were not being granted the same privileges as were the people of Great Britain. As an engineer he supervised the placement of obstructions in the Hudson River through the highlands. George Washington, commander-in-chief, considered this effort of the utmost importance to the survival of the Revolution. If the British had gained control of the Hudson River region, they would have geographically separated the thirteen colonies and could have brought about an early collapse of the Revolution.

The story that follows is a biographical sketch of Thomas Machin and traces his life in a chronological fashion.

Sequential page 831

THOMAS MACHIN -- PATRIOT

● by Gary A. Trudgen; Endwell, New York

Thomas Machin was born on March 20, 1744 four miles from Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, England. His father, John Machin, was a distinguished mathematician of his day, who had two sons, John and Thomas. Thomas' brother John was killed at the siege of a town near the Red Sea outlet. Thomas was an English artillery cadet attached to the British infantry. The cadets distinguished themselves for their bravery in the battle of Minden, Germany in August 1759. Here the cadets were all but annihilated by the forces of King Ferdinand and the French in the Seven Years War.

After the war ended, Cadet Machin returned to England and was employed by James Brindley, a celebrated civil engineer and mechanical inventor. Machin served as a surveyor, business manager and paymaster for hundreds of Brindley's employees in the building of a canal for the Duke of Bridgewater. The canal was built between the coal mines at Worsley and the city of Manchester, a distance of ten miles, to facilitate the portage of coal. With such practical experience, and Brindley as a tutor, and being a good mathematician and surveyor, Machin became an excellent civil engineer.

Upon completion of the canal, he sailed to the East Indies for reasons unknown. After returning home to England he then set sail to America in 1772 and took up residence in the city of New York. His purpose for coming to America was to examine and explore a copper mine in New Jersey for some British investors. The mine turned out to be only a rumor.

After a short stay in New York City, Machin moved to Boston with the intention of becoming a permanent resident. While in Boston he became allied with the colonists in their cause against England.

It is thought that he became a member of the "Sons of Liberty" and participated in the "Boston Tea Party" in December 1773.

Since Machin was trained as an artilleryman and was also a skilled engineer, he was asked to help plan the fortifications at Bunker Hill when hostilities began. During the attack in June 1775 at Bunker Hill, he was wounded in one arm while acting as Lieutenant of Artillery under the Continental Army's chief engineer Colonel Richard Gridley.

Judging by his enlistment dates, it is possible that Machin took part in Knox's epic removal of the guns from Fort Ticonderoga, and their transport across the mountains to Dorchester Heights during the winter of 1775-1776.

In January 1776 he received his first commission in the American service, as Second Lieutenant in the artillery regiment commanded by Colonel Henry Knox. Knox had been impressed with the skill with which Machin had managed his battery on the field of battle at Bunker Hill.

After the British evacuated Boston, Machin was selected to engineer defenses for the city and harbor of Boston during the months of April through mid-June 1776. At that time he was also instructed to survey a possible route for a Cape Cod canal between Barnstable and Buzzard's Bay. This canal was to provide safer shipping of supplies between New York and Boston. His proposal called for a 14 foot deep canal with double locks at each end at a construction cost of 32,000 pounds.

George Washington was aware of the skillful manner in which Machin had laid out the fortifications around Boston earlier that year. In July 1776, Machin received a letter from George Washington requesting that he proceed to Fort Montgomery, in the Highlands, on the Hudson River to act as engineer in completing works already started and to start new works that were deemed necessary to secure the passage of the Hudson River against the enemy. His commanding officer was Colonel George Clinton and his unit was The Line-Artillery, Second Regiment under Colonel John Lamb.

Machin's first assignment was to lay out and build a battery on the tor just south of Fort Montgomery. The new defense came to be called Fort Clinton.

Machin also busied himself in the Fall of 1776 by planning an obstruction known as a chevaux-de-frize to be placed in the river near Pollopels Island, which is a small island near the eastern shore, nearly opposite New Windsor. The obstruction consisted mainly of square cribs of round timber, locked at the corners. The cribs were filled with stone to hold them down and in them were iron-pointed spars projected upward at a 45 degree angle intended to pierce the bottom of a ship.

In November 1776 a chain was drawn across the Hudson River at Fort Montgomery. Soon after it was in place it parted twice. Machin, who had not been involved with the planning and construction of this chain, was asked to review the problems. After he had comprehended the difficulties, he assured the committee investigating the problem that it could be made to serve its intended purpose. The committee then requested and authorized Machin to alter and repair the chain.

Sometime during the latter half of 1776, Machin also found time to apprehend Tories and turn them over to the committee of Ulster County.

In January 1777, Machin was promoted to Captain Lieutenant in the Artillery. He visited George Washington at his winter headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey. There he complained to Washington that he hadn't received his pay since the month of May 1776.

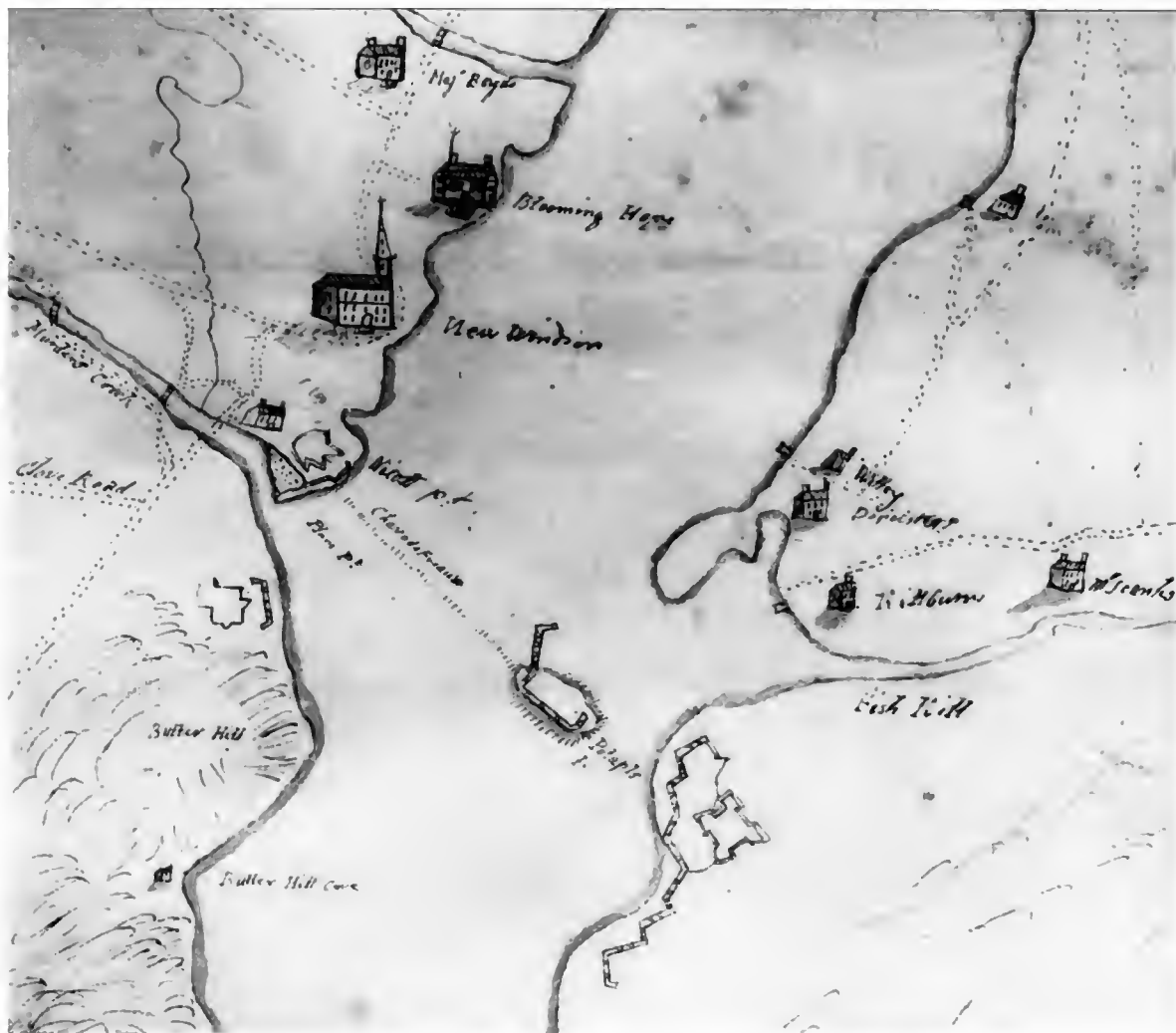


Section from Thomas Machin's Map of the Hudson River Through the High Lands
Dated January 4, 1778
Fort Montgomery to Fort Independence

In late March 1777 he completed the alterations that he had proposed to repair the Fort Montgomery chain. The alterations gave satisfactory results.

During the months of April and May, 1777 he traveled back to Boston to study a method for obstructing the Boston channel.

When he returned in June 1777, he continued to work on the chevaux-de-frize to be placed in the river at Pollopels Island. At the same time he began construction for a new boom that would replace the one already at Fort Montgomery. The existing boom was imperfect and unfinished.



**Section from Machin's Map Showing Chevaux-de-frize
and Fortifications Near Pollepels Island**

In early October, 1777 as Machin was preparing the new boom for Fort Montgomery, he was involved in the British attack by Sir Henry Clinton on that Fort. It was late in the afternoon and Machin was defending the chain and boom with a heavy gun when his gunner was shot down by his side. He quickly snatched the linstock from the hand of his fallen gunner and applied it to the gun. At that instant, Machin was severely wounded when a ball entered his chest and came out under his right shoulder. Near sundown a man aided Machin in their retreat. However, this man was shot and fell upon Machin, who had a difficult time removing himself from beneath his dying comrade. Finally, as it was growing dark, he was taken to a boat and thus made his escape.

Machin was taken to the New Windsor farm home of General George Clinton, the newly elected governor of New York. There he spent several weeks during the months of October and November, 1777 recuperating from his wound. While he was at Clinton's farm he received very kind treatment and from that time on he was closely allied with the Clinton family.

By December 1777, he had recovered sufficiently from his wound to go house hunting for the Clintons in Poughkeepsie. He rented the substantial Crannel house that had been abandoned by its Tory owner. The old Clinton house and farm in New Windsor was left to Machin to look after and dispose of.

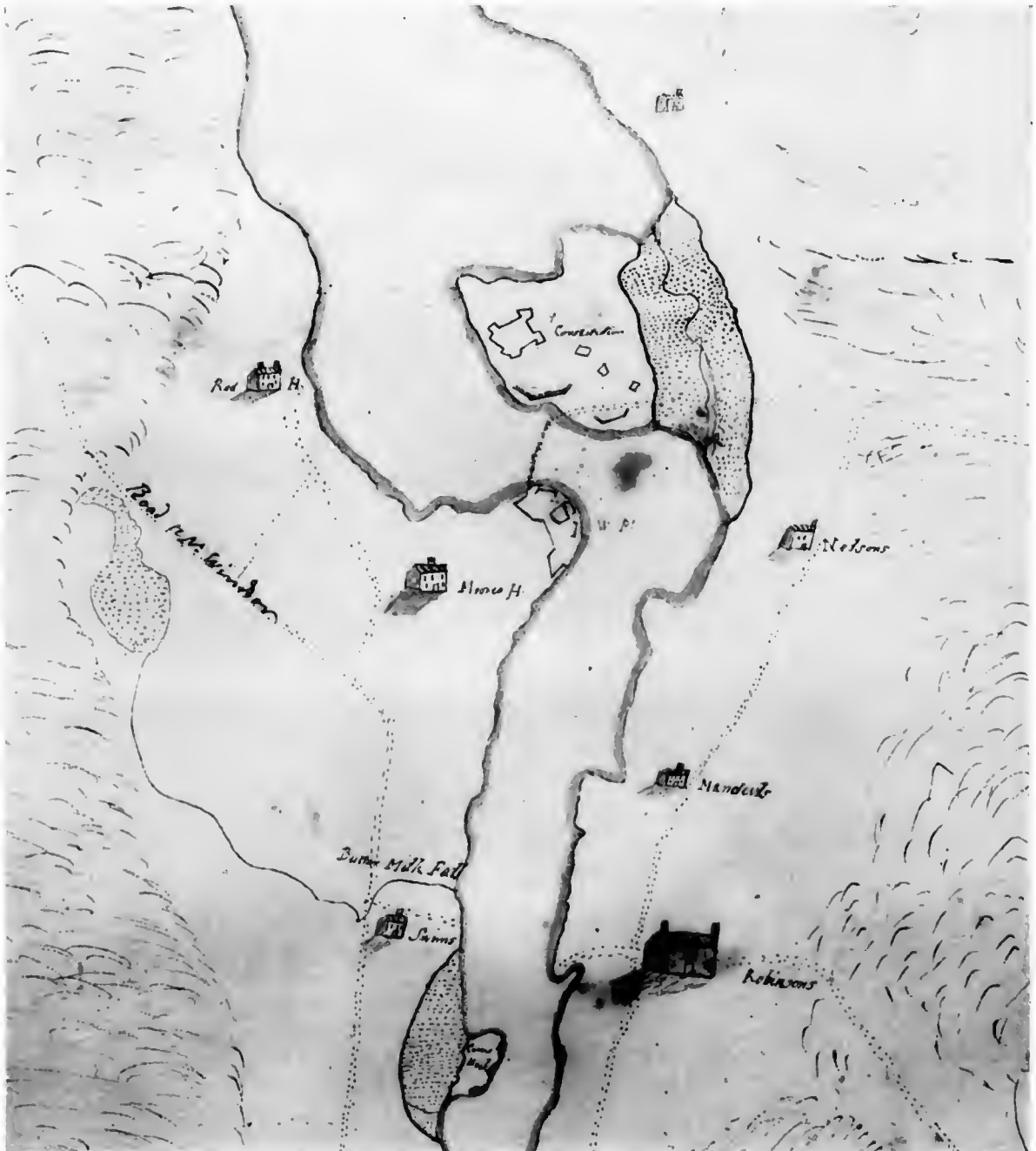
When the British overran Fort Montgomery in October 1777, they destroyed the boom that Machin was to rebuild and also removed the chain. In addition, when the British continued up the river to destroy Kingston, the chevaux-de-frize near Pollopels Island had, unfortunately, not been completed and was thus ineffective.

In mid-January 1778 Machin met with the State Congress delegates and several military people in Poughkeepsie concerning once again the fortification and obstruction of the Hudson River. The decision was made to place a chain at West Point because it could be well defended. Machin was given the responsibility to get the job done. He was to supervise the construction of the chain and determine the method to be used to support it in the river.

In February 1778, Machin contracted the Sterling Works owned by Mr. Townsend in Warwick, Orange County, New York to manufacture the Great Chain for West Point. The contract for the Great Chain said that it was to be 1500 feet in length; each link about two feet long, two and a quarter inches square, with a swivel and clevis at every 100 feet. The chain would be floated upon white-wood spars to help support its weight (approximately 50 tons) and iron anchors would be attached to the spars and down to the river bottom to hold it in place.

The chain was delivered in an incredibly short time - six weeks - and was installed in the river by late April 1778.

Machin was very particular about the grade of the ore from which the iron was forged to make the links of the chain and also the timber for the spars that would float the chain. Machin planned that the Great Chain should be strong enough to withstand the shock of two or three sail-ships hitting the chain at the same time. The Great Chain was never tested by the enemy.



Section from Machin's Map Showing
West Point and Fort Constitution Areas

During the month of May 1778, Machin helped raise the Lady Washington, a galley, from the Hudson River at Kingston Creek. The vessel had been purposely scuttled when the British came up the river to burn Kingston in the Fall of 1777.

By the month of June 1778, Machin was directing the construction of a boom to be placed a little down river from the Great Chain at West Point. It is thought that he probably used materials from the boom that had been intended for the Fort Montgomery boom before that Fort was overrun. The boom was probably installed sometime in late June or early July 1778.

The chain and boom were removed annually as winter approached and replaced in the spring to prevent their being carried away by river ice.

In April 1779, Machin commanded an artillery unit in the expedition of Colonel Van Schaick against the Onondaga Indian nation near Syracuse. The expedition marched from Fort Schuyler on Monday morning the 19th, and returned 5 1/2 days later covering a distance of 180 miles without losing a single man. Van Schaick's men killed 12 Indians, took 34 prisoners, and destroyed all of the Indian's possessions.

In May 1779, Machin was again engaged in engineering. He surveyed and mapped the Mohawk River between Albany and Schenectady with the intent to supply water to Albany. He submitted a plan to the city corporation to show the manner in which an aqueduct and reservoir should be constructed.

However -- come June 1779, he was back again with an artillery unit in General Sullivan's expedition into the Genesee valley region. While on this expedition he executed a handsome map of the Cayuga and Seneca lakes with a table of distances. At the battle of Newtown (Elmira) it was Machin's artillery unit along with Colonel Thomas Proctor's eight field pieces that frightened some 1000 Tories and Seneca Indians from their prepared defenses with accurately placed cannon balls. He received praise from General Sullivan for his cannonading. During Sullivan's expedition against the Indians, a male white child was discovered in a deserted Indian village at the outlet of Seneca Lake (September 7, 1779). Machin was in ill health at the time and not on duty, so he tenderly cared for the child. When the child's parentage could not be determined, Machin adopted him and christened the child Thomas Machin. He placed the child with a family near Kingston, New York where the child died some two years later of smallpox.

By October 1779, Machin was back in New Windsor and shortly thereafter he traveled to Morristown, New Jersey to help lay out the winter encampment of the Continental Army.

During the summer of 1780 he was back in the highlands again, probably New Windsor, at times helping with recruiting personnel for service in the

army. In September 1780 he served as a member of a committee that was to report to the Legislature of New York concerning the distressing situation of the troops.

In March 1781 Machin was appointed as New York State's first engineer under Surveyor-General Philip Schuyler. Machin continued to serve under Schuyler's successor, Simeon DeWitt when he assumed the office in May 1784. At that time the Surveyor-General's office was nearly smothered with requests for bounty grants of land from Veterans of the American Revolution.

During the first half of 1781, Machin was again engaged in the recruiting service at New Windsor. He received honorable mention from the State of New York for furnishing one or more soldiers at his own expense. Later, in the fall of 1781, he accompanied his artillery regiment, under General Knox, southward with Washington's army to Yorktown, Virginia. He helped plan the approach trenches and the artillery emplacements. During the early part of the siege on Yorktown, a British ship was annoying the Continental forces by its cannon fire. General Knox asked Machin to silence the ship with his artillery. With mathematical skill he estimated the range, very carefully measured the gunpower, and with great deliberation sighted a field piece and fired. The first shot sank the hostile vessel.

After the battle of Yorktown, Machin returned to New Windsor to continue in the recruiting service, and - sometime in early 1782 - announced his engagement to marry Susan Van Nostrant, the daughter of James Van Nostrant of Huntington, Long Island. All was not well, however, with his recruiting activities.

Thomas Machin was court martialed at Verplank's Point, New York on September 23, 1782 for recruiting violations. He was charged with; (1) Enlisting a soldier belonging to the second Connecticut regiment to recruit for him on August 15, 1782; (2) Enlisting two men unfit for service. He was found guilty and was recalled from the recruiting service, and - in addition - had to pay the expenses incurred for enlisting Thenis Fountain, one of the men unfit for service. Machin's recruiting violations are, perhaps, understandable when one considers that they took place around the time of his marriage. It has also been said that he disliked the recruiting service!

In May of 1782, under orders from George Washington, Machin went to Fishkill, across the river from Newburgh, and brought back new troops for his line. One half for the artillery regiment, and one half for the infantry regiment.

Just before his marriage to Susan took place in August 1782, someone circulated a report that Machin had a wife in Boston. At Machin's request, Timothy Dunning went to Boston and proved the report false. Dunning's wife was a sister of Susan. The wedding took place at the home of Timothy Dunning in Goshen, New York.

During the latter part of 1782, Machin was engaged in surveying and mapping 26,643 acres of land near Cooperstown, then in Tryon County, for Joseph Wharton, Esq. of Philadelphia. Machin ascertained the amount of the mortgage, the back taxes, and other obligations against the property, recorded the deeds and sold the land to the entire satisfaction of the owner.

In January 1783, Machin did a favor for his friend Governor George Clinton by looking into the condition of a tract of land that the Governor owned. In March 1783, Governor Clinton commissioned Machin a Captain and the rank was made retroactive back to August 21, 1781.

By April 1783, near the end of the Revolutionary War, Machin was cutting timber at Great Pond, now Orange Lake, in preparation for building a dwelling. He moved into his new home near the end of May 1783. He named the area in which he settled New Grange, this area being a few miles west of Newburgh, New York.

It is believed that Machin took part in the occupation of New York City by the Continental Army troops under General Knox when the British evacuated the city on November 25, 1783. He attended a dinner given that evening by Governor Clinton in honor of General George Washington at Fraunce's Tavern.

It should be noted that at the close of his career in the army Captain Machin had gained the reputation among his fellow soldiers as being plain, honest, trustworthy and competent. He was a very good friend of Governor Clinton and his family and was well liked by individuals in high command, such as George Washington, General Knox, General Sullivan, General James Clinton, and etc. It should also be noted that he was one of a few who served the entire eight years of the war. Thomas Machin was honorably discharged from military service on November 3, 1783.

In 1784 Thomas Machin erected a number of water-powered mills, such as a grist mill and saw mill. The grist mill was built on the east side of Great Pond. It was a wooden structure of 30 x 40 feet and two stories high. It was located approximately 700 feet distant from the pond.

At the grist mill Machin opened a new outlet which provided water, to a large extent, for Chambers Creek. Originally this outlet was an overflow for times of high water, the natural outlet being further west at a place called Pine Point.

In September 1784, Governor George Clinton moved to New York City and requested that Machin send down his winter stock of firewood.

Starting in 1785, Machin applied for land bounty rights that eventually amounted to some 81,000 acres. He was ultimately allotted approximately 5100 acres in scattered portions in Herkimer, Oneida, Schoharie, and Montgomery counties. He eventually resold most of this land.

On July 17, 1785 his son, Thomas N. Machin, Jr. was born. (He lived to the age of 89, dying on May 18, 1875). It was this son, Thomas, Jr. who would later relate his fathers coinage activities at Machin's Mills.

On March 3, 1787 Machin filed a petition for the right to coin money for the State of New York. Then, on April 18, 1787 Machin formed a copartnership with five men from New York City. They were James F. Atlee (a die cutter), Samuel Atlee (a porter brewer), David Brooks, James Giles (an attorney at law), and James Grier. The firm seems to have been formed in the anticipation of Machin being granted the right to coin money in New York State. Three months later, on June 7, 1787 Machin's firm formed a copartnership with a coining firm from Vermont which had already been granted permission to coin copper in that state. The Vermont firm consisted of four partners: Reuben Harman, Esq., William Coley, Elias Jackson and Daniel Van Voorhis (a goldsmith from New York City).

The legal contracts drawn up were quite extensive, indicating that the two firms expected to do a large and profitable business. Machin was to provide the minting house, the grist mill that he had erected in 1784 on Great Pond, for the New York firm, and the Vermont firm was to erect a minting house at Rupert, Bennington County, Vermont.

Giles was to have charge of the writing and book-keeping; Harmon and Coley were to manage the Vermont firm; Machin and J.F. Atlee were to manage the New York firm; Grier was to be the cashier of the money coined at Rupert; Van Voorhis was to be cashier of the money coined at Machin's Mills; Grier and Jackson were to have the general management of the expenses and purchases of necessary articles; while other joint business was to be performed by Brooks and Samuel Atlee.

At Machin's Mills the coins were struck with a screw type coining press. It had a large bar loaded at each end with a 500 pound ball with ropes attached. Two men were required at each side of the bar in addition to a man to set the planchets for a total of five men to operate the coining press. About 60 coins could be struck in one minute.

The source of copper from which the coins were struck was obtained from old brass cannons and mortars. The brass was smelted in a furnace to remove the zinc and obtain the copper to be made into planchets. Also, it is known that a large quantity of copper planchets was shipped to Machin's Mills by Major Eli Leavenworth. Many of these planchets are thought to have been Nova Constellatio coins.

Several different types of copper coins are believed to have been minted at Machin's Mills. These are:

- (1) New York State Patterns -- In anticipation of being granted the right to produce coinage for the State of New York, the dies for a few patterns of better than average design and weight were engraved by James F. Atlee and some specimens of each were struck.
- (2) Vermont State Coinage -- When Machin failed to obtain the right to produce a coinage for the State of New York, he produced a quantity of Vermont State Coinage, principally the 1788 issues. This in turn allowed the Rupert Mint (possibly) to strike some Fugio coppers from dies they obtained from Benjamin Buell when the mint in New Haven closed. Benjamin Buell joined into partnership with Rueben Harmon and may also have supplied some Connecticut dies which Harmon made available to Machin.
- (3) Connecticut State Coinage -- Machin's Mills also struck several 1787 and 1788 varieties of Connecticut Coppers. It is interesting to note that approximately one-third of the 1788 Connecticut issues are struck over Nova Constellatio coins.
- (4) New Jersey State Coinage -- There is some evidence that a few New Jersey copper varieties were struck at Machin's Mills.
- (5) Imitation British Halfpence -- James F. Atlee engraved a number of dies for counterfeit British halfpence from which coppers were struck at Machin's Mills. These coppers were lightweight and were struck from poorly treated dies to aid their acceptance into circulation.
- (6) Mules -- Finally, in addition to the above, a number of mulings, coins having unrelated obverse and reverse dies, were produced at Machin's Mills.

Generally speaking, the 1787 and 1788 product of Machin's Mills, independent of the specie, consisted of lightweight pieces usually having somewhat indistinct detail because of poor die preparation.

It is interesting to note that the coinage business at Machin's Mills was reportedly conducted in secrecy. A guard with a hideous mask was employed to frighten away the curious.

One has to wonder how at this time Thomas Machin justified the illegal minting of counterfeit and lightweight coppers. All evidence up to this point in his life

indicates that he was an honest person who in his own words "detests deception." If one were to speculate, perhaps he became discontented with the State of New York when he was not granted the right to coin money for the State and also when he was granted only a small percentage of the land bounty rights for which he had applied.

Machin's Mills ceased operations sometime in the 1790's, probably due to the adoption of the Constitution. On October 14, 1790, James F. Atlee wrote to Thomas Machin requesting that the partners dissolve the enterprise on suitable terms so as to avoid a tedious and expensive lawsuit.

The coining press, cutting machine, and rollers were removed from Machin's Mills mint house during 1792, and - reportedly - the sloop Newburgh, under Captain Isaac Belknap, carried the coining press as part ballast for a number of years.

In the fall of 1790, Machin visited his lands in Montgomery County. He had acquired 1500 acres of wilderness land in 1789 in Montgomery County and part of Schoharie County. With two hired men he erected a log tenement, cleared a fallow (area for plowed land), planted fruit trees, currant bushes and made maple syrup sap-troughs. In January 1791 Machin moved his family from New Grange to his lands prepared the previous fall. The area which he settled eventually became the town of Charleston. His lands were situated 10 miles north of the Schoharie Court House and 20 miles south of Johnstown village.

During 1793 Machin erected a frame house on his farm which became his residence. After Machin had moved to his farm near Charleston, he continued in his profession of surveying and mapping of land patents. He did this for General Nicholas Fish, Colonel John Lamb, his former commander, and other large land owners. Today, his surveyors chain is in the possession of the Montgomery County Historical Society, Fort Johnson, New York.

Machin was a charter member of The Society of the Cincinnati established at Newburgh by the officers of the Continental Army to perpetuate their friendship and raise a fund for relieving the widows and orphans of those men killed during the war.

Machin also belonged to the fraternity of Free Masons, in which he was very active during the latter part of his life. In February 1807 he was appointed Master to install officers at the establishment of a new lodge at Schoharie, New York.

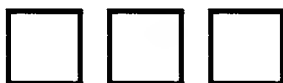
Machin maintained contact with his old friend George Clinton who was now Vice President of the United States. In April 1808, he wrote Clinton in petition for a pension which was granted. Then in March 1810, he wrote Clinton again for an increase in his pension.

Thomas Machin died at his farm residence near Charleston on April 3, 1816, at 72 years of age, and was buried in the family graveyard on the farm. Eighty years later, when the farm had been abandoned, his remains were moved and reinterred with military and Masonic honors in the Carlisle cemetery, just off U.S. Highway 20. His final resting place was marked by a modest marble slab. In 1955, a historical marker listing his major accomplishments and patriotic record in American history was added to his grave site. A sketch of the marker and gravestone, rendered from a photograph, illustrates the frontispiece of this issue of CNL.

Captain Machin's son, Thomas N. Machin, Jr., was a graduate of the Albany Law School, and a Captain in the War of 1812. He eventually rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the New York State Militia and later became Speaker of the State Legislature of California. He married Nancy McMichael in 1810.

Thomas N. and Nancy Machin had a son, Timothy N. Machin, who like his father graduated from Albany Law School. Timothy was elected Lieutenant Governor of California and was a widely known attorney and real estate operator. They also had two daughters, Susan, the eldest, and Phoebe. Susan married John Hason on February 2, 1847 and Phoebe married Stephen Crosby on January 18, 1849.

This concludes our biographical sketch of the life of Thomas Machin. Research is continuing on the mill site at Orange Lake where, today, about all that remains are a few foundation stones and topographical features that point out the water course between lake and mill. We plan to present our findings regarding the actual mill site at a later time.



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**THOMAS MACHIN'S MAP of
Hudson's River through the High Lands
dated 4 January 1778**

We are grateful to Cornell University Library
for their permission to reproduce Thomas Machin's Map of January 4, 1778.

The original map measures 13 x 46 inches and it has been necessary to reduce it significantly in size in order to reproduce it in the pages of CNL.

The scale works out to be six miles wide and some twenty four miles in length and covers an area from just south of Newburgh, New York to Kings Ferry. It shows in detail the roads, forts, homes of inhabitants and the man-made obstructions in the Hudson River.

The map was drawn while Machin explored the Hudson River Highlands, along with seven men, from January 1 to January 6, 1778 and may well have been used during his discussions, described on page 836, leading to the decision to install the Great Chain at West Point. The river chains located at West Point and Sathy's Island had to be proposed locations when the map was drawn, for, as we know, the Great Chain was installed at West Point about four months after the map was drawn. Nothing, apparently, was ever done at Sathy's Island.

The entire map is reproduced at approximately one-third original size on pages 847 and 848. Selected portions of the map have been included in appropriate locations with the text to illustrate the discussion. These inserts are reproduced at approximately three-quarters of the original size.

The map is catalogued at the Cornell University Library as:

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